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LIFE IN AN
ASYLUM.



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LIFE IN AN ASYLUM :

Strange Stories,

Sayings and Doings of Madmen.

BY

AN EX-ATTENDANT.

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P R E F A C E.

THIS little book does not claim to be either an exhaustive or an elaborate description of Life in an Asylum; all it is intended to do is to convey to the reader a fair idea of what it is like.

Some people may object to the work—even as it is, with the most harrowing details suppressed—on æsthetic grounds; but those who build a wall of selfishness around their own bright little worlds are infected with a spirit that is the greatest foe to universal happiness. We should not raise up the curtain of ignorance between ourselves and the afflicted; we ought rather to dig down to the roots of human ills, and see whither they tend and how they are propagated. Much of the suffering and affliction herein described might have been spared mankind if our ancestors had guided their labours for us by more common-sense views of life's evils. We are now standing in their places, with the destinies of the future in our hands, and we cannot do our duty if we deliberately shut our eyes to spare our feelings.

Some of the stories, and many of the sketches, have already appeared in *Tit-Bits* and *Old and Young*, and I have to express my indebtedness to the proprietors of these papers for their permission to reproduce them here.

For obvious reasons, the names I have had to introduce are either fictitious or represented by an initial letter; and the same necessity forces me to subscribe myself

EX-ATTENDANT.



LIFE IN AN ASYLUM.

PART I.

MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS.—I DISCOVER A VICTIM OF TYRANNICAL
DETENTION. — HIS EXTRAORDINARY STORY. — INSPECTOR
STAMMERS.



LIFE within an asylum is not without its comicalities, incredible as it may seem ; and even the imprisoned sufferers themselves are often vastly amused by the outrageous sayings and doings of their fellow patients. Of course, these are the better class of inmates, who, barring a few illusions, are rational enough. To a casual observer nothing comical is presented by such a life ; it is only when one has passed two years, as I have done in the capacity of an attendant, that its most comic, as well as its most tragic side, manifests itself.

And that tragic side of asylum life ! Who could doubt that there is such a thing ? Who, that has ever passed close to the sombre walls of an asylum and heard the wild ravings, the fierce shouts, and piercing cries, has not involuntarily shuddered at those dismal sounds ?

But it is reserved to those who daily move among the poor wretches, who minister to their wants, and who hear them breathe the names of the loved ones from whom they must evermore be isolated, to fully realize the tragedy of their blighted lives. The natural affections are not always dulled even when the mind is hopelessly affected ; madmen are as capable of tender emotions, and as susceptible of acute pangs as people in the full possession of their senses.

When I first turned my face towards H— Asylum I was a very young man with a strong muscular frame and an iron constitution. It was a glorious day in early summer I well remember. The hedge-banks were aglow with the first blush of beauty, a delightful perfume floated in the air, and the birds were singing

right gaily—a wild gladness was in the very atmosphere ; the sun, the fresh wind, the clouds seemed brimful of joyousness, and then the sudden transition to the wards of the asylum ! How well I remember it ! Perhaps at that time my heart did not feel it so acutely as the memory of it affects it now ; my views of life were only just unfolding, its enigmas did not crave so earnestly for solution, I held some Power outside of nature responsible for all that misery and, affliction my eyes opened on, and consequently was inclined to look at all I saw in a matter-of-fact light.

On approaching the asylum I felt very brave ; in fact, I was quite proud of myself. Not a tremor of fear disturbed my heart and I reckoned I should be as cool among the madmen as the oldest attendant. But, oh, what a humiliation was in store for me ; yes, and before I entered the door of the institution too !

The gate-house was over two miles from the main building, the grounds were so extensive. The avenue leading to the principal entrance pursued a sinuous course, dipping into hollows, winding over elevations, and cutting right through the centre of a few shady copses. No lengthened view of the avenue was, therefore, obtainable at any one point. Just as I was climbing up a steep incline, and at the loneliest part of the avenue, a patient with a hay-fork on his shoulder loomed up before me. He had as repulsive a countenance as ever I saw, and to add to its repulsiveness he was winding his mouth into all manner of hideous contortions. He came straight towards me snarling like a dog, a most treacherous look in his small, black eyes. It was the first time I ever seriously thought of death. I was just on the point of casting down and abandoning my all on earth then—a hat-box and a gladstone bag—when the poor fellow put an end to my fears by asking me in a meek voice for a “bit of backy.”

I had dinner with the head attendant whose name was Tom Green. He told me in the course of our conversation that he had been employed at the institution for over twenty years. I looked at him scrutinizingly, a sort of impression on my mind that such a long association with madmen must have affected his own brain, but nothing could I trace in his kindly face and fine dark eyes, but every indication of a calm, energetic, keen, determined man ; nor as my after intercourse with him proved, did his countenance belie his character.

Dinner over he hastened to introduce me to the scenes of my future labours. He took me along with him on his afternoon round. We looked in at the laundry as we were passing it. The first room we entered was fitted up with steam washing machines. Several male patients under the charge of an attendant were performing various tasks in a sober and orderly manner ; in fact, to look at them going about their work there seemed to be nothing the matter with them. From the machinery room I was conducted

into the drying and mangling rooms, where twenty or thirty female patients were at work. The women were noisier than the men, but they seemed to be inspired with more animation and energy than the latter. One old crone, as ugly a woman as ever I looked on asked me for a bit of "backy." I gave her some and she began chewing it with a smile of satisfaction on her wrinkled countenance.

A covered walk brought us to the first of the wards, which happened to be the convalescent. The inmates here showed little signs of insanity. I entered into conversation with one or two and they appeared to me quite rational. Tom Green told me they were fit to be discharged, but that they were generally kept for a month or so to test if their recovery was likely to prove permanent.

We passed through a corridor and entered another ward. Here I was confronted with insanity of the most pronounced type. My guide told me it was the epileptic ward, and indeed it was unnecessary, for no sooner had we entered the ward than a piercing wail broke from a patient as he fell prone on the floor kicking and writhing in a fit. Though the spacious apartment was well ventilated and everything was scrupulously clean, I could detect a peculiar smell which Green attributed to my imagination, but I rather think that it was his nose that was at fault. It was pitiful to see the poor fellows moping about here with a fixed idiotic, melancholy stare happily oblivious of their sad position and surroundings. Perhaps. Some, it is true, were lively enough, singing comic songs or whirling round and round in a savage dance, occasionally flinging their caps in the air in the exuberance of their spirits.

We did not remain long in this ward. We passed into the next, which was a sort of intermediate ward for patients showing signs of recovery. In the middle of a wide lofty apartment (the spaciousness of each of the well-ventilated and liberally lighted day-rooms was indeed a laudable feature of the building) stood a billiard table around which a group of patients was gathered interestedly following a close contest between two of their fellow-sufferers. Others were seated at small tables enjoying a game of chess, draughts, or backgammon, while the greater number sat reading magazines or newspapers on cushioned seats running around the walls. A few were pacing the length of the room excitedly, but this, the head attendant told me, was exceptional conduct; ere long they would grow as calm as the others.

The wards were separated by corridors with little bed-rooms, or, as they are known among the asylum folk "single rooms," running along each of the sides, or by glass partitions. Passing through one of the latter a regular babel of deafening and bewildering sounds assailed my ears. Green had to bawl the information to me that it was the refractory ward. One patient was shouting as loud as ever he could, another was hurrying up and down the

limits of the apartment vociferating unintelligible sentences and winding his arms about, another, seated in a chair, was methodically beating his feet against the floor, another stood with his back against the wall as mute as death, his arms spread out horizontally, a little lower down was another hopping about on one leg, in fact, everyone of the patients here was behaving in some wild or ludicrous manner. But the din! Shall I ever forget it? How a sane man could pass twelve hours in it seemed marvellous to me then; and here were two attendants coolly moving about as unconcerned as if nothing out of the common were going on around them. Most of the patients, mad as they were, could, I believe, see that I was a stranger and took a mischievous delight in paying me unwelcome attentions. First one would sidle up to me and give a hideous grin right in my face, then another would pluck me by the sleeve and pass some incoherent remark, or a patient would cast himself down at my feet right in my way. Just as I was leaving the ward an ex-circus clown jumped on my back with an hysterical laugh, and the two attendants and Tom Green had as much as they could do to get him off.

The next ward we visited was the reception ward. Here were the two padded rooms and some twenty or thirty "single rooms," one of the latter being fitted up as a bath room. All new arrivals were kept here for a week or so under the watchful care of an intelligent attendant, who noted their peculiarities, if they showed suicidal tendencies etc., and then reported to the medical superintendent on their case, and so enabled him to send them to the wards most adapted to their needs. Only a few feeble old men were in No. 1, as it was called, just then, and these were remarkably dull and silent.

He then conducted me to No. 3, and handed me over to the charge attendant of this ward to be initiated into my duties.

For the first few weeks it fell to my lot to do day-room duty exclusively, and most trying I found it, surrounded by insanity in all its forms—men fierce and turbulent, men moping about in a helpless state of idiocy lamentable to behold, some playing tricks and indulging in antics much to the amusement of their saner brethren, many roaming about eagerly and tirelessly seeking for a way to escape without a definite aim or purpose to guide them, were the covert liberty obtained. Here was a man excitedly pacing backward and forward between two points giving vent to wild exclamations and horrible oaths, there another whirling round and round in an unmethodical dance, or close by my side rose the dreary monotone of some poor wretch repeating over and over again words of comfort and hope belonging to the past that still lingered in the ruined brain.

What a blessed relief it used to be when all the patients were in bed and I had the opportunity of mingling with the other attend-

ants in our dining-room. Here about thirty of us used to assemble of an evening and pass a pleasant couple of hours.

One of the patients caused me a deal of uneasiness during the first days of my novitiate. He was a Spaniard with a gaunt haggard face, a flowing steel-grey beard, and the blackest of black eyes that scowled most horribly. I was afraid of him—I freely confess I was—for he had a trick of creeping behind me when my attention was elsewhere, and on turning, there would he be, his dark fierce eyes sternly fixed upon me. But, as my after experience of him proved, he was the most docile of creatures. Poor unfortunate fellow he knew no word of English, he was to all intents and purposes alone in the world, and there, day by day, paced about the ward unable to exchange a word with anyone. Thus, as it were, condemned to a life of eternal silence, it may be imagined how keenly he must have felt, in whatever lucid moments he had, his sad position.

In mixing with the patients, which I freely did after the first blush of strangeness had worn off, the remarkable intelligence displayed by many of them filled me with wonder and astonishment. So rational did a few appear that their insanity was incredible to me. Were they the victims of capricious detention was a question I seriously and frequently asked myself. If they were, it justly deserved the fullest exposure I thought. Many plausible and harrowing tales, moreover, were told me by men who solemnly avowed they were detained to satisfy the cupidity of their friends, until I wondered why no one denounced an injustice which so alarmingly menaced the liberty of the subject.

One man in particular, stood out in this respect prominently from the others. His dark intelligent face would have singled him out for observation among a hundred; and the more I saw of him the more he interested me, till a keen curiosity was awakened in me to learn something of the patient's history.

But he was a gloomy, taciturn individual that shunned intercourse with anyone who sought the less frequented passages of the ward, and chose the dullest corners of the airing ground.

One day I spoke to him. He met my advances at first with a cold civility; but the few words he did utter stamped him as a remarkably rational man of superior manners; so my interest in him was considerably enhanced, and I thenceforth availed myself of every opportunity of winning his confidence.

Gradually the stern frigidity of the patient relaxed before my earnest efforts to coax him into friendliness. Little conversations took place between us, at which I felt more and more convinced that the indications of intellectual powers in this man's face were not far out, nor were the slightest symptoms of mental derangement noticeable in his speech. That the unfortunate fellow was condemned to a home of horrors by selfish friends, or some mistake,

perhaps, convinced me more strongly as the intimacy between us ripened.

More lengthy conversations, thereafter, took place, in which the patient displayed a masterful grasp of subjects, extending over a wide area. Current politics he discussed with the grace and easy flippancy of an experienced statesman, social and religious topics were handled with a scholarly charm, and his discourse was rich in quotations from ancient and modern writers.

His coherency in dealing with his subjects, the strong intellectual force he brought to bear upon them, and the self-reliance of the man, free from even a suspicion of mental infirmity, amazed me, and a firm conviction of this being certainly a case of unjust detention finally settled itself in my mind. I, therefore, diligently cultivated his acquaintance with a view to learning something about him.

"You, perhaps, wonder why I am here?" said he to me one day in the middle of an animated conversation, while his dark handsome eyes flashed with subdued indignation.

"Well, I must confess it has often puzzled me," I returned.

"I ought not to be here," he rejoined calmly but bitterly, "nor should I be here were it not for fools. Fools rule the world and sensible men must bow to them. I'll tell you why I am here; it is through eating watercresses."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed; "I never heard they were unwholesome."

"Ah!" sighed he, casting down his eyes, a note of pathetic sadness in his voice. "You partly share the world's opinion; you think I'm an imbecile, I see. But you're wrong, the world is wrong; I am not mad unless you would call the agony of feeling one's vitals slowly consumed, madness."

"It is here," he continued unbuttoning his vest. "Feel its movements and then say is it madness?"

Placing my hand on the spot indicated by the patient I imagined I detected a movement quite distinct from that of respiration.

"Now do you believe me? It is there, and there it has been for over twelve months torturing me with pangs that no ordinary mortal could possibly endure."

"Let me begin at the commencement of my misfortunes. I had always been very fond of watercresses, and once while staying in the country I went to gather some every morning by a stream which flowed through a deep narrow ravine at the foot of a mountain. I noticed it was the favourite haunt for snakes; a thing that troubled me little then, for, of course, I attached no importance whatever to it. I enjoyed the watercress; it was well-flavoured and juicy.

"Some time afterwards I began to experience a most peculiar

sensation. You no doubt have felt something like it yourself if you have ever remained for any considerable time without food. It gradually grew worse and worse although I ate heartily and never felt so well from a physical point of view.

"This gnawing, sinking sensation increased to such an alarming extent within a couple of weeks that I forthwith consulted a doctor. He gave me medicine but it neither banished nor even relieved the uncomfortable sensation. It grew worse and worse, my days and nights finally becoming one dreary round of excruciating torments.

"Doctor after doctor was consulted, but though they all looked wise—as the idiots always do—not one of them could diagnose my complaint. From the faculty I drifted to quackery and spent pounds on patent medicines.

"Disgusted with the inefficacy of the latter, I sought the advice of the most eminent practitioners in London with the most disappointing results. From London I went to Paris, thence to Vienna, and ultimately crossed over to Berlin.

"In the latter place I consulted a gentleman who was a specialist in gastric ailments. He examined me and asked innumerable questions with reference to my former life. Happening to mention my fondness for watercresses, his face brightened up with a sudden glow of intelligence. He closely questioned me as to the source I generally had my supplies from, and I mentioned among many other places the gulch, where, previous to my illness, I gathered morning after morning the cresses, making a casual allusion to the number of snakes which had made it their habitat.

"‘Yours,’ said he, ‘is one of those cases occurring but rarely. About two hundred years ago a similar case is recorded. The egg of a snake found its way into your stomach among some pieces of insufficiently masticated cress and settling in the peptic glands was incubated there. You have now living in your stomach a young snake, endowed with wondrous properties of life capable of sustaining its existence on the small quantities of oxygen introduced into the alimentary canal with your food.’

"You may imagine my horror at learning that my stomach had thus been converted into a miniature reptile house. I asked him what he could do for my relief, could he perform an operation, or by any means kill the loathsome thing.

"He merely shook his head, and writing out a prescription, which he told me might perhaps—laying particular stress on the word perhaps—slowly kill it, he advised me to return home at once, take what he had prescribed, and eat very sparingly.

"I did as directed. Three times a day I took the medicine and allowed myself the smallest quantity of food compatible with the wants of nature.

"Slowly, but with appalling certainty, I was conscious of the

horrid thing increasing in size. Frequent and peculiar twinges were perceptible in the lower region of my chest. The terrible fear suddenly possessed my mind that the reptile was attacking the walls of my stomach ; a strong confirmation of which resided in the fact that the less food I took the more acute the prickly pangs and maddening twinges became.

"I, literally speaking, poured brandy down my throat in hopes of killing the beastly thing ; but it seemed to make it a hundred times more ravenous. I felt the inexpressible gnawing, gnawing, and then rather than have my stomach slowly devoured, in desperation I consumed all the food I could, and intense relief immediately resulted.

"Thenceforward I ate heartily, and though I could feel the reptile moving about, rolling and revelling, as it were, in the chyle, the alarming twinges grew less frequent, and only a feeling of emptiness and an insatiable craving for food remained.

"The hopelessness of my case, however, stimulated my brain. I set my mind in motion, I thought and thought, and at last hit upon a plan—a capital plan that would have given me instant relief, but before I could carry it out they locked me up here, idiots that they are ! I intended to put a baited hook down my *æsophagus*, and fish the brute up."

That gave the death blow to my credulity. The seeming rationality of the monomaniac is an extraordinary fact. You will meet with a man in an asylum who can converse with you on almost every subject in such a sensible manner that it will make you wonder why on earth they keep so sane a man locked up, till he confidentially tells you that Michael the Archangel is an intimate friend of his or something equally as absurd.

The man of titles is to be found in all asylums. There was a most venerable and aristocratic-looking old gentleman at H—— who had land and titles not only all over the earth, but in the moon, and the planets in addition to which he was the original king of Zion.

Another old fellow with a scientific turn of mind used to frequently force himself on my attention during the early days of my keepership ; he loved to find someone who would listen to his nonsense. He was always trying to prove that the famous men of one generation are the madmen of another. According to his calculations Wolsey, Cromwell, Peter the Great, Louis XI., and many other bygone notables were his daily companions. He himself was King Charles I. ; in fact, his head he imagined was simply screwed on and it was easily unscrewable. Ruskin he asserted would be a refractory patient of an asylum at some future period, requiring a strait waistcoat.

What a lot of trouble Bill Stammers gave before I acquired that tact, self-confidence and determination so essential to an attendant

on the insane. Every time he saw a door opened he made a rush to get through it. He fancied he was still an inspector of railway shunters, and wanted to get away to see to the making up of the trains.

One night as we were lingering over our supper table a fellow attendant told me all about poor Bill. One windy November morning he and his brother-in-law, a porter, were jogging along side by side going to their work. They had exchanged few words on the way as the wind was high, and being full in their teeth, it rendered their conversation unpleasant till the inspector suddenly said :

"Starkie the driver of 64 comes back to duty this morning."

The porter started, and gave his companion a side glance. Just then they were passing beneath a gas lamp, and as its light fell on the inspector's face his companion saw, or imagined he saw, an unusually anxious and care-worn look on it.

"Bother the man," said Bill presently, "it was against my grain to have to report him, a fortnight's suspension is a serious thing for a man with a family, but he deserved it for his obstinacy, might have wrecked the up express and killed ever so many people. 'Twas hard on him I'll admit to have to go shunting after doing his bit, but it could'nt be helped ; we were three engines short through specials."

"He's a rum-tempered fellow," remarked the porter, "and Bill, take my advice and keep a sharp look out."

"That I will mate. Poor Bess and her five little ones would be badly off if anything happened to me. Do you know, Bob, I've many a time been sorry for not hearkening to your advice."

"When I told you," queried the porter, "to have nothing to do with their blooming promotions."

"Yes."

"Didn't I tell you how it would be. Now you see what a mug you have been. Didn't I tell you to say as I always said 'I ain't scholar enough.' You haven't a brown put by—how could you on three and twenty bob a week and two bob taken back every week for clubs and other swindles got up by the directors for our good as they say. I suppose they'll be for giving you a third class station-master's crib afore long and docking you two or three bob a week ; that's the sort of an Irishman's rise they give on railways. It's all very well to have a nice gold band around your cap, but I prefer to be so as I can keep my eye on the weasels."

"I was far better off when I was a porter," the inspector remarked.

"I know it mate. Have you had a moment's peace since you took on with the job ; always in hot waters ain't you, and always will be as long as your inspector Stammers. Don't I know as every-

body else knows as knows anything about railways, that all your sharp inspectors, as the company think so much on, murder their shunters to get their trains made up smart—murder them Bill, you can't call it aught else."

They had now entered the precincts of the station. As they came upon the platform they faced each other.

"Now," continued the porter, "you're my brother-in-law Bill, and your Bessie's husband, and that makes me feel towards you as if you were Bob Coulson's own flesh and blood. I ask you as you value your life, and I ask you for the sake of Bessie and her five youngsters to beware of Starkie. He's a run-tempered chap, as I said before, and the wind is high, and the night dark, and a light engine would be on top of you before you knew where you were."

"All right, Bob, old man, I'll look after myself."

Saying which Inspector Stammers started for the yard to superintend the shunting leaving Bob Coulson looking after him with as anxious a look as ever sat on the face of mortal man.

"What would poor Bess do if he was runned over," mused Bob Coulson as the form of his brother-in-law disappeared into the darkness; "she ain't got not a stiver to call her own. Poor Bess! I shouldn't care to see her in trouble. She's the only one woman as ever I felt fair gone on, and we might have been spliced only for old Bet Giles's lying tongue. I do wish as Bill never took on to that job of inspecting. Poor Bess; what a blow it would be to her if he was runned over."

A pitchy darkness, through which the lamps flickered faintly, hung over the station. Strong gusts of wind howled through the arches like enraged monsters, completely drowning the whistles of the engines.

"What a morning 'tis to be sure," muttered Coulson, turning away to commence his duties. But he couldn't settle down to them methodically. Several times did he leave what he was doing, and going to the edge of the platform looked up towards Beechtree yard where the shunting operations were going forward. He could see nothing, for beyond the station limits, except where the green and red lights of the signals shone, all was in darkness. But he seemed to glean a sort of consolation in doing so, for he would immediately return to his work and hum a tune till again prompted to take another look in the direction his thoughts evidently kept travelling.

The hours crept on. The howling gusts swept through the archways with a wild and ever-increasing energy, bringing with them at intervals torrents of cold rain and sleet. In the east the clouds were beginning to wear a faint tinge of grey where the dawn was encroaching on the heavy murkiness. Gradually the greyish spot grew wider and wider, while louder and fiercer bellowed the wind, the sleet coming down in one incessant rush.

Bob Coulson had again come to the edge of the platform, and as he glanced along its length he could discern fast moving figures in the dim light at the other end. Something had happened to make those slow-going methodical officials hurry like that. What could it be? Down he hurried to inquire.

"Anything the matter mate?" he asked a grimy-faced man, who had just come across the broad network of rails, and stood energetically shaking the wet from his saturated clothes.

"Only one of the shunters runned over in Beechtree yard," he replied nonchalantly, shaking his dripping overcoat, and then added "Starkie again. He's a rare 'un for knocking them over. Ugh, ain't it a soaker?"

Bob did not wait to ask another question. He dived into the downpour of sleet and keeping well within the six-foot way, directed his steps for Beechtree yard. When he arrived at the open space termed in railway parlance a yard, he saw a light in one of the sheds. He was hurrying towards it when the station-master who had only recently been appointed to the station stopped him.

"Is that you Coulson," the stationmaster asked.

"Yes sir," answered the agitated Coulson, and immediately inquired, "Has anyone been killed sir?"

"Stammers."

A groan almost broke from Coulson's white lips.

"Do you know where he lives Coulson?"

The station-master caught a faintly murmured "yes."

"Well then, I wish you'd go at once and break it to his wife. Tell her his foot was caught by a shifting point just as he had signalled for 64 engine to come back. It was very dark at the spot, so Starkie didn't see him till the engine had passed over him."

The stationmaster hurried off leaving Coulson bracing up his nerves for the harrowing task before him.

It was between seven and eight when he arrived at Bessie Stammers' door. He paused some considerable time before taking the knocker in his fingers, his heart thumping violently against his side and his breath coming in short gasps. At last he summoned up enough courage to knock, and then his heart almost ceased to beat when he heard the general stampede of little feet within, and joyous shouts of "Dad." On the eldest opening the door a cloud of disappointment settled on their joyous faces, but recovering their normal spirits in an instant, the children gathered round him with noisy jubilant shouts of "Uncle Bob," and dragging and tugging at him with all their might, they drew the heavy-hearted bearer of woeful tidings into the kitchen where his sister-in-law was up to her eyes in preparation for Bill's breakfast.

It only required one look at Bob's troubled face to tell her woman's quick mind that something was wrong.

"What is it Bob?" she asked, with a searching glance.

He paused for a second or two his lips quivering and then with an ominous shake of his head, he said slowly "Starkie the driver of 64 came back to duty this morning."

"Oh heavens!" she cried, sinking on her knees before him "is he hurt, tell me is my dear husband ——?"

She buried her face in her hands as the half-finished sentence died on her lips. The little ones stood by in a hushed and frightened group, and the rashers hissed and spurted frizzling in the pan, Bob laying his broad palm on her shoulder gently whispered, "Be brave Bess there's a good lass."

She looked up at him her eyes blinded with tears. "Tell me at once is he hurt, or—or tell me if 'tis the worst?" she cried.

His breast heaved convulsively and his strong legs trembled beneath him as he looked down at the frail woman at his feet. He stooped and lifted her up in his arm and then in husky accents told her the sad truth.

"Bessie 'tis the worst."

The next minute her lifeless body hung on his arm. Believing she was only in a swoon he laid her on the couch. Her looks, however, told him it was something more serious, and he was rushing off for a doctor when whom should he meet coming up the street, but the man he thought was dead.

"Hello," cried Stammers, noticing his brother-in-law's scared face, "What's up?"

"I—I thought you were killed, they told me you had been runned over."

"What! ejaculated the inspector faintly smiling, they told you I was runned over did they? 'Twasn't me 'twas my namesake, poor Dick Stammers, the new stationmaster had sent across to do relief work."

"For God sake run in. Bessie—I've told her " was all Coulson could get out as he hurried off for medical aid. When he returned with a doctor he found Bill beside his wife's corpse a maniac. There, in H—— Asylum, was the poor fellow passing a miserable existence every day and every hour—ay, every few minutes appealing to heedless ears to be let out to see to the making up of the 8.35 train.





PART II.

EARLY MORNING IN THE ASYLUM.—EDWARD LAXLEY'S ESCAPE.—
SUNDAY.—PUTTING THE PATIENTS TO BED.—WHAT A
JEALOUS WOMAN DID.



H, if you could, dear reader, have a peep into one of the wards the first thing in the morning, say the ward in which the epileptic patients are confined, with what feelings of pity you would look at the poor fellows. I don't think you would ever again respect the individual rights of anyone that, directly or indirectly, contributed to so much human misery and affliction. Material progress that cannot embrace the lives of the humblest and the poorest, you would no longer regard with superstitious awe, and I fancy a little reflection would prove to you that the most terrible Devil on earth is Selfishness. To see those wild haggard looks, that awful stare of melancholy, the pale drawn face of him that the demons of his disordered brain had kept awake all night, was a picture not easily forgotten.

Just fancy yourself in one of the large airy day-rooms. It is half-past five of a summer's morning. The day-room is empty, and so silent that you can hear the birds singing outside, and can even catch the cawing of the rooks, wheeling over the distant woods. Presently the silence is broken by the click, click of locks, and the night attendant, in his list slippers, glides past you on his way to call up the other attendants. By-and-bye the bell rings, the flagged corridors begin to reverberate to heavy footsteps, there is a jingling of keys, more clicking of locks, and down come rushing about twenty patients. Some of them go straight to the lavatory, others take up their fixed positions in the ward, where they may be found at any time of the day, and from which they must be forcibly ejected even for their meals. Down creep others in twos and threes, shrugging their shoulders, rubbing their eyes, grinning, gesticulating, and muttering.

You would see the same thing every morning, and up those whitened stone steps in the dormitories, where the attendants are rousing the sleepy ones from their slumbers, almost the same scenes were to be witnessed throughout the year. Many were reluctant to leave the blankets, necessitating physical force being resorted to. A few, after being hauled out of bed, sullenly remained in their shirts and the attendants had to dress them, and rather roughly was the task performed in one or two cases, I fear. One or two were reduced to such a sad state of imbecility that they hardly knew whether they were clothed or not; these were rarely subjected to inconsiderate usage. One huge fellow, shaggy bearded, with beetling eyebrows, a most ferocious-looking man on the whole, would start to dress himself, but leave off after a moment or so in apparent forgetfulness and look stupidly at his attendant, who was urging him to get on his clothes quickly. Neither coaxing nor even a shake or two availed; his mind would travel away from his task, and the attendant's patience being at last exhausted, he dexterously shook the giant into his garments. He always seemed to resent the inevitable rough handling, and commenced a vehement protest which invariably died away in a pathetic murmur.

It was rather a relief to, at any time, turn to the convalescent ward, but more especially before breakfast. The patients used to be all busy washing themselves, brushing their hair, or cleaning their boots. How eagerly every morning were those heavy steps along the flagged corridors listened for. It was the out-door attendants coming for the patients who worked in the fields, and about fifty generally trooped off after their heavy-booted guardians. The charge attendant was busy the while in his little store-room dealing out flannel and soap to patients who were about to set to scrubbing the day-rooms and dormitories. One large and two smaller day-rooms, together with offices used for various purposes, were on the ground floor. Overhead was an exact repetition of this, the lofty well-ventilated apartments being used for the patients' dormitories, and the smaller ones being set aside for the attendants, so that they should be close at hand in the event of the night attendant requiring assistance.

The charge attendant's wife was always to be seen bustling about the dormitories, while the large windows were wide open and a healthy country breeze blew in on the beds. Everything was necessarily in disorder early in the morning—the bed clothes lying about in bundles on the floor, the bedsteads pulled out of line, with some half dozen patients sweeping around and beneath them.

If you went down again to the day-rooms, they now wore a deserted look, as most of the patients in this particular ward preferred out-of-door labour. Some dozen or more patients would

be scrubbing the floors under the superintendence of an attendant.

From thence, if you passed into the refractory ward you would hear once more the same deafening cries, see the same antics gone through, and the patient mute against the wall. On each side of the ward, as I said before, were single rooms. The doors of these would be thrown open, and a contingent of patients from another ward sweeping the floors, making the beds, and gathering up the fragments of blankets or rugs torn up during the night by destructive patients. The bell might be rung for breakfast while you were here. The patients brought in to do the cleaning at once trooped off to the other end to be let out, while the inmates of the ward made a rush in the opposite direction. You would see the poor fellows behaving exactly like the wild animals of a menagerie at feeding time. They pressed their faces against the glass partition watching for the breakfast wagon, and when they saw it coming they hustled and fought each other as they pressed around the door. The attendants pushed them aside to admit the wagon. Then began a determined struggle between the patients and attendants to save the catables from being incontinently devoured. With the greatest difficulty the wagon was got alongside the tables, and while two of the attendants kept the ravenous fellows at bay, another laid the tables. When all was ready, the attendants on guard stepped aside, and a rush was made for the food. Some drank off their coffee at once, and then clutched at their neighbour's cup, necessitating the ready intervention of the attendants; others noisily demanded more bread and butter after bolting their allowance, and being refused, snatched away that of another patient who had not quite such an unappeasable appetite, and ate it greedily. Breakfast over, each of them resumed their chosen stations, and recommenced their noise and antics as if they looked upon such proceedings in the light of a daily task.

From here, suppose you crossed over to the ward in which the inmates in an intermediate state of madness were lodged. Breakfast would be over just as you got there, but the patients still sat at the tables chatting together amicably. As you entered the charge attendant rapped a table, a sudden hush fell upon the babbling tongues and grace was said, after which, all rose from the tables and betook themselves to the cushioned seats running around the walls.

Then, after breakfast, suppose you had a look around the grounds. First you visited the pleasure gardens bright with exotics, thence passed into the turnip field, where you found a number of patients hoeing and thinning, going from there into a field of early cabbages. The next thing to be seen was the slaughter-house, in which patients were at work. The gas-house, after that, should claim your attention. Here several patients used to work. One

man, I particularly remember, took such a keen pleasure in his work. He often assured me, with a broad smile on his good-humoured smutty face, that he was the only man in the world who knew how to draw a retort properly.

Returning to the wards, you would probably find Tom Green passing the word around for the patients to be taken into the airing-yards. Some were delighted to get into the open air, but others had to be forcibly put out, and one or two scrimmages invariably occurred while this was being done.

Another peep at the dormitories would well repay you for its exertion of climbing up the stairs. They are now in apple-pie order, the beds with their red quilts and partly over-lapping white sheets standing in even rows, with three feet of carpeted gangways between each row. The charge attendants' wives used to take especial pride in their dormitories, and so well they might, for they were always sweet, faultlessly tidy, and patterns of cleanliness.

In the southern wing of a building was a door known by the name of Laxley's door. Once a patient of that name had been purposely let out by an attendant. It was such an extraordinary thing for a man in that position to do, that I once got questioning the head attendant about it, for it had occurred in the early years of his service in the institution.

"Yes, I guess Jem Hankside was a madman if ever there was one," began Tom Green, as we were sitting before the ward fire that night, after putting the patients to bed. "He came here among a batch of new attendants. Something there was about the fellow I couldn't fathom, and the more I saw of him—and that was a great deal, for I was acting for the chief attendant then—the more convinced I became that we had plenty of saner men under lock and key.

"I sent him to do duty in No. 9, the convalescent ward, the easiest ward in the building for an attendant. I was, therefore, rather astonished when a few weeks after I received a request from him to be transferred to No. 5. I made no comment about this extraordinary request, and promised him I should see about it. He, however, so pestered me with his daily petitions, that before the end of the week I consented to allow him to change over with a man in No. 5.

"Two days after, an attendant came to me with the report that a patient named Edward Laxley had escaped from No. 5. This was about six o'clock in the evening. Laxley was always trying to escape to fulfil the one object of all his thoughts—to kill his wife, and so save her from some terrible evil he imagined was in store for her; a thing he went very near doing before he was sent to the asylum.

"Knowing this, I at once collected all the attendants that could be spared, and started them off in different directions to hunt for

the fugitive. Hankside and I went towards the village. He was very silent on the way there, merely answering shortly any questions I put to him. When we reached the little village his manner suddenly changed, and he pressed me to have a drink with him.

"'No no,' said I, 'not now; let's first make inquiries of the village folk and see if any one noticed him passing through here.'

"'D——n inquiries!' shouted he, angrily. 'What's so pressing about it? Let's go and have our drink first.'

"With a peculiar glitter in his cold, deep black eyes, he seized me roughly by the collar, and dragging me into the tap-room of the village public, forced me down on a form.

"'Let the fellow go to the devil,' he muttered morosely, and then asked me, 'What will you drink?'

"'Ale,' I answered.

"He called for a tankard and two glasses. As he stood before me I was struck with the wild, restless look in his eyes, and on the ale being set before him he proceeded with trembling hand to fill the glasses. He closed the tap-room door, took a long draught, and then turning to me, said :

"'Let Laxley go his way; if he does kill her, 'twill serve her right.'

"I started up and stared hard at him.

"'Come, Hankside,' said I, authoritatively, 'you know something about this job?'

"'Yes, I do!' he cried, excitedly. 'With these keys—shaking his bunch of keys in my face—'I let him out. Stand where you are!' he hissed fiercely, seeing me glance at the closed door, 'or I'll split your head open with this glass. Let him murder her—let him murder the flirt that broke my heart. She first won my love; yes, did all she could to win it, and then jilted me for him, the jade! He'll pay her out to-night for her cursed tricks, for I've given him the sharpest razor I could buy.'

"I made a rush for the door, but quick as springs a cat he was before me, barring the way. I had a madman to deal with, I could see, so I threw myself upon him, and a short, sharp tussle took place, ending in my pitching him into a corner. I then rushed away, and ran as fast as I could to the post office. Fortunately I remembered the address I wrote in the book the day Laxley was admitted, so I despatched a telegram to his wife, saying, 'Your husband has escaped. Beware!'

"Having done this, I hurried back to the asylum, and put the position of affairs before the governor. He immediately consulted the railway time-book.

"'Get out the steward's trap at once,' said he, 'and let some one drive you to the station; you'll just be in time to catch a train for W——, and you may succeed in getting there before Laxley.'

"I did as the governor directed, and about eleven the same night got to W——. Outside the station I asked the way to Mrs. Laxley's address. It was on the outskirts of the town, I was told, and off I went at a round trot for the place. Soon I began to hear the word 'Fire!' shouted, and right before me could see a glare in the sky. By-and bye two men raced by me, and I heard one of them say, 'Wavertree Cottage,' the name of the house I was making for. Turning the next corner, I came upon a house completely enveloped in flames and smoke, and ere I had stood a minute looking on I learned from the excited talk of the people gathered before it that it was Mrs. Laxley's house.

"'Where is she? where is Mrs. Laxley?' I asked, pushing into the middle of the crowd.

"'Inside,' said some one.

"'Can nothing be done to save her?' I cried, excitedly.

"'Save her!' echoed a bystander. 'How could a living soul go near such a fire?'

"A second's calm survey of the burning house told me it was impossible. Down came the fire brigade the next minute, and, after a lot of bungling with the hose-pipes, the engine was got into working order. Suddenly excited cries were raised, the crowd divided, and into the gap rushed Laxley, pale and excited. He halted near where I stood, but he didn't seem to notice me.

"'For Heaven's sake, tell me, what is all this?' he shouted at the top of his voice. 'Where is she?'

"'Edward, come with me,' I whispered in his ear, catching him by the sleeve.

"'No, no,' he cried. 'Where is my wife? where is my Jane?'

"'Burned to death!' bawled out some unfeeling wretch from the crowd. He turned and stared in the direction the voice came from, as if appealing for a confirmation of the terrible news, and then at me, and I suppose he read it in my agitated looks, for down he dropped on his knees, moaning:

"'Jane! Jane! Oh, my poor Jane!'

"Well, after a lot of trouble I got him away and took him over to the police-station, where, sure enough, I found a razor in his pocket; but he had no recollection of how he came by it. It was evident, however, that a great change had come over him; he talked to me quite rationally, and seemed greatly concerned about the finding of his wife's body. All night long I sat beside him in a bedroom the sergeant's wife had humanely placed at my disposal. He slept but little, and frequently during the night had long fits of bitter crying. In the morning, the sergeant's wife prepared him a nice breakfast, and when she brought it to him, the way he thanked her convinced me that the shock he had received had partly, if not wholly, restored his reason.

"Now comes the curious part of the story. As he was eating his breakfast, and just after asking me for the hundredth time at least if his wife's body had yet been found, I saw him jump to his feet and rush for the door. Up I started too, but before I had time to put one foot past another he had a young woman in his arms.

"Jane! Jane! you are safe! Thank God! Thank God!" were his delighted exclamations.

"It was his wife. She had received my telegram only after some unaccountable delay, and in her hurry to get away and hide she upset a paraffin lamp. She never paused to try to put the fire out, but hurried away out of the town, and took refuge in a stable till morning.

"Three months after, Laxley was discharged from the asylum. He had had a lot of worries before going wrong in his head. Since his discharge things have gone smoother with him, and his wife and he are now living happily together. Hankside was never heard of afterwards. It was true, though, about Jane Laxley jilting him."

Sunday morning is the best time to have a ramble through the wards of an asylum if you are bent on observation; you can see all the inmates then and note their various peculiarities. My first Sunday at H—— was a regular feast of observations, for being a new hand I was bandied about from pillar to post. All the patients were in the day-rooms, out-door labour being, of course, suspended. Several patients I found still lingering in the lavatories even at 11 a.m., making themselves look as smart as possible in expectation of a visit from their friends. Some were most careful of their personal appearance, while others seemed only happy in raggedness.

An old man who had taken on himself the task of looking after a little idiot boy, very much interested me, for the old man apparently found a keen pleasure in his self-imposed labour, and the lad was, evidently, fond of his old friend. Hand in hand they were walking up and down the day-room; they were never apart for any considerable length of time. Whenever the parents came to see their afflicted lad, old Davie was allowed to accompany him to the visiting-room, and he faithfully recounted the doings of the little fellow with the pride and enthusiasm of a fond father expatiating on the exploits of a precocious child. And when the old patient received his present of tobacco, which was generally his reward on those occasions, his eyes sparkled, and he was ready to swear that he was as fond of the lad as if he were his own son.

I was introduced to a nobleman with a most formidable array of titles. Few asylums, I believe, are without their aristocracy. This one was rather prolific in such, and contained an emperor as well, who was also a poet. As I passed him each time he had his pencil and scrap of paper in his hands, all absorbed in his poem-

making ; so much so, that the antics of a patient gyrating on his heel in front of him interfered, it seemed, in nowise with the current of his thoughts.

A remarkable case was that of a patient who imagined himself suffering under a loathsome disease. He was moping about the day-room groaning loudly as if he were in intense pain. He was in the best of health, but day and night he was incessantly haunted with the idea that the disease was slowly killing him ; and he bitterly upbraided the doctor whenever he had an opportunity for not trying to cure his malady.

Sitting in one corner of the day-room was an odd individual who, whenever he was spoken to first spat on the floor and rubbed the spittle with his foot before replying to what was said to him. He had a remarkably fat, rosy, jolly face, and when he smilingly looked at you, a most comical expression peeped from his eyes. If an attendant asked him to sing a hymn he went through the operation of spitting on the floor and spreading the dirty patch beneath his feet, and then, to the disgust of a few strict sabbatarians near him, struck up a song with the following refrain. "It's all for the grog, boys, the jolly, jolly grog," &c. No amount of attention could keep him tidy ; he seemed to glory in raggedness.

There was, in No. 6 ward, a man scarcely five feet in height, who hardly ever spoke. During the two years in the institution I had this patient under my daily supervision, yet not once had I heard him open his mouth. On the rare occasions when he did say anything his words were incoherent and he was extremely dangerous. At such times he was known to make a savage attack on an attendant or a patient without the least provocation. The first time I looked at the little man sideling in and out through the other inmates who were walking about, a good-humoured smile playing around the corners of his mouth, his appearance, I must say, belied his treacherous character.

A "mahogany" man, an inmate of the refractory ward, was a strange, and to the attendants, a troublesome being. He believed he was made of mahogany. He was indifferent to rough treatment and would have fearlessly faced a giant, for he was under the impression that any injury he received a cabinet maker could repair.

About 11.30 a.m. on Sunday the bell rang for church. Only those who could be depended on to keep quiet were permitted to attend divine service. I accompanied the patients to the little chapel in the grounds. All things considered they were very orderly during the service. A few jumped up and looked wildly about them for a moment but then sank back into their seats. One poor woman was seized with a fit and she was immediately borne outside. Another ventured a few comments during the chaplain's sermon. But on the whole it was a devout and atten-

tive congregation, and I have heard worse singing in other places of worship.

When the patients returned from church dinner was ready for them in a large dining-hall. On this day, only those too feeble or too refractory had their dinner served in the wards. The dinner passed off very quietly and decorously, only a few showing any marked idiosyncrasies. One man had to have his dinner away from the others on account of a habit he had of reiterating a string of filthy expressions. Another was so fond of mustard that he would have gobbled up the whole potful had it not been kept beyond his reach. The man who believed himself afflicted with a fatal disease, to whom I have already alluded, had to be driven by threats to eat his allowance of meat, and he did so with piteous appeals for mercy, for he considered all kinds of animal food aggravated his complaint. Another old fellow I could not help noticing, his face was so radiant with good humour. He sat among a lot of sullen patients talking the most unadulterated nonsense, and laughing all the while immoderately. On the conclusion of the meal, the majority of the patients evinced a restlessness to get back to the wards, and this, after the knives and forks had been counted and put away, and grace said, they were allowed to do.

Six o'clock, all the patients, the convalescents excepted, had to retire to rest. Most of them seemed, early as the hour was, only too glad to rush off to bed. Others, on the contrary, were most reluctant to do so, and had to be ferritted out of corners where they had hidden in hopes of evading the early-to-bed rule. The first Sunday evening I accompanied the head attendant on his rounds, as he wanted me to go with him to the gatekeeper's lodge. A very rational inmate, judging by his speech, and one Green assured who was wellaware the attendants must carry out their orders, turned rebellious and refused to go upstairs in No. 6 ward. The presence of the chief attendant, of course, had a restraining effect on them, but the attendants behaved with laudable forbearance although the patient treated themselves and their commands with contempt, and gave one of them a stinging blow on the mouth when they were driven to use force to remove him to the dormitory.

"Will you punish him for striking the attendant?" I asked.

"He ought to be punished," he remarked; "the fellow knows the attendant dare not return the blow, and that very rarely is the shower-bath punishment put in force, and what is the result? It makes that class of patient most obnoxious, and frequently leads to the asylum losing the services of a good man." He told me there were several patients in the building who made a boast of the number of attendants they were the means of having had ignominiously discharged, a statement I was soon able to verify myself. He would not agitate for punishing those absolutely incapable of

differentiating between the right and the wrong, but a patient as rational as the one who had just assaulted the attendant, ought not to be allowed to provoke a man with impunity he held. It is a great mistake, I assure you, to look upon all patients as irresponsible for their actions; in fact, in some cases, they ought to be made amenable to the common law.

On ascending the steps to the dormitories of this ward the majority of the patients was snugly tucked up in bed, but a few still knelt in prayer, and a few more stood in the gangways unable to remember where their beds were. One by one the attendants were leading these to their cots, but even then they stood with an absent-minded stare on their faces and ultimately had to be undressed and put to bed like helpless children.

By-and-bye, when all were in bed, Green passed up and down along the gangways, and finding one bed without an occupant called an attendant's attention to it. "That's Ned Robinson's sir," he explained; "I expect we shall have to carry him up," and calling to a fellow-attendant, both started off to look for the missing patient. We followed them downstairs to where a solitary inmate was sitting. "Come Ned," said one of the attendants cheerily, "bedtime." He slowly lifted his head and favoured the attendant with a stupid stare. The latter repeated "bedtime"; he shook his head. "Come on," said the attendant, laying hold of his arm, but he shook himself free. "I'm not going to bed," he shouted: "look at the sun miles up in the heavens. How can you say 'tis bedtime." Coaxing they knew would be a fruitless waste of time, so without further ado the two attendants seized him and carried him off, he vociferating "I'm going to meet Annie at sunset."

"Poor fellow," commiserated Green, as the attendants with their burden disappeared up the steps, "his is a sad case, and so you will say when I tell you how he lost his senses."

"Well, about Ned Robinson," said he, after he had double-locked all the exits from the male side of asylum (with the exception of that by which the attendants went in and out), and we were on the way to the gate-keeper's lodge, "he comes from the village of Goosenagh, at the north end of the county. You heard how loudly he cried out about having to meet Annie at sunset. Annie used to be a sweetheart of his. He was the handsomest fellow in the village I've been told, and I don't doubt it, for stupid-looking though he is and wasted by the melancholy idle life he leads, you can see it in him still. He had the misfortune—I can call it nothing else—of having two girls in love with him at the same time. Jennie Parsons was one and Annie Davis the other. Jennie was the girl he favoured with his attentions at first, and everything was going on fairly towards their being married when Annie Davis's mother, one of those artful designing women every class of society seems cursed with, threw out her wiles to catch him for her daughter, and

by Gum she succeeded in luring him away from his girl. She would invite him to tea, do you mind—she was then a widow, and Annie was her only daughter—and after tea she was sure to find some excuse to leave them alone in the parlour together.

“Notwithstanding this, Jennie and Ned still kept company together and things seemed going on as usual. I don’t think at the time Ned looked on Annie more than as a friend, but you know yourself, or if you don’t you will when you are as old as me, that such friendships are dangerous things. However, as I said just now, no change was to be noticed in the young people; they went to parties and excursions together, and Ned and Jennie were generally looked on as a pair next door to being married.

“Annie’s mother, however, had set her heart on him marrying her daughter. She used to get up tea-parties and dances, inviting the young folks of the village, Jennie included, and encouraged flirtations among them. Ned was something of a male flirt I’ve been told, and Jennie was rather jealous-minded and frequent little squabbles took place between them over his goings on that a sensible woman ought’nt to have noticed. One night he danced too often with Annie, another night he talked to her more than he ought to have done, and the upshot of this needless harrying was to drive Ned right into the arms of the other. On the following Easter Monday he openly took Annie for a day’s trip to H——, leaving the neglected one at home to weep and gnash her teeth.

“Too late did Jennie awake to the folly that had deprived her of her sweetheart, and now began doing all in her power to undo the mischief. She cast herself in his way whenever she could, put forward her most winning smiles, and put on her most becoming gowns, did her hair in exactly the style he liked best, and, in fact, left no stone unturned to win back the lost lover.

“But all her efforts proved of no good. Day by day, and week by week, she had the mortification of seeing Annie and Ned becoming more and more attached to one another, and Ned was one of those true honest natures whose love, once firmly established, stands as steadfast as a rock, and I rather suspect Jennie knew this.

“The colour gradually fersook her cheeks. She seemed terribly cast down and took to moping about the country roads looking as sad and miserable as the forlornest creature in the world could look.

“One day an old Irishwoman, who was well posted up in the history of her blighted love affair, accosted her on one of her lonely walks and drew out of her a full and free confession of her troubles. ‘I’ll tell you what to do,’ said the Irishwoman, ‘do what the girls do in my county when they want to win the boys they love. Look here,’ and going to the side of the hedge she pointed out a weed growing there (I could never find out what weed it was) says she, ‘brew a little of that in a cup of tea and I’ll go bail he’ll be yours till death.’

"Jennie took little notice of these words at first, in fact, she received them unbelievably, but they set the silly wench's brain on the go, and as the drowning person catches at a straw, she, in the end, made up her mind that the experiment was worth a trial. She gathered a handful of the weeds—more than the old Irishwoman dreamt of her gathering, and one afternoon when she was alone at home she brewed them with some tea, and then sent across for Ned saying she had something particular to tell him.

"He came across to the cottage. There was a scene between them, each laying the blame for what had occurred at the other's door, which ended in her indulging in a hearty fit of tears, and Ned's honest breast melting a bit. Catching him in a tender mood, she pressed him to remain to tea. He did so, and unsuspectingly drank two cups of the nasty decoction, never heeding about her only sipping at hers.

"That night Ned fell into a sleep, from which he didn't awake next morning, nor at noon, nor when evening set in; the night passed and still he slept. His friends, of course, ought to have sent for a doctor but they didn't. A few old women held a consultation over him and came to the decision of waking him by hook or by crook. So they began bawling into his ear, beating tin cans at his head, and even went as far as sticking pins and needles into his flesh. They did succeed at last in rousing him from his stupor, but he was an idiot, and an idiot he has been ever since.

"Jennie was sorely grieved when she found what she had done, and ere long went into a galloping consumption and died, her last prayer being for Ned's recovery, which I'm afraid will never be granted. Annie afterwards married Ned's most intimate friend and boon companion. Sometimes they come to see him, but, bless you, though he shouts out her name every time the attendants have to carry him to bed, he doesn't know her when they meet."





PART III.

A MIDNIGHT VISIT TO THE DORMITORIES.—IN THE BATH-ROOM. —
A REFRACTORY PATIENT.—THE STORY OF THE DWARF.—THE
PATIENTS' DANCE.—HOWARD MERVIN.

MONDAY is, as a rule, a busy day for business men. It is a day of planning, of apportioning to each of the coming days its work ; and how they fret, and fume, and worry, if, as the days slip by, all the schemes and projects they hoped would send up their wheel of fortune a degree cannot be accomplished, sowing perhaps, thereby, a tiny seed of insanity in their minds for their posterity to reap.

What a contrast was here in the asylum ! verily an awful moral to the tale of insensate strivings after wealth. No Monday's hopes of plans excited its inmates. To a convalescent patient it may have counted a day nearer to his discharge, but nothing more. There was no going forth to labour full of busy thoughts for the ensuing week. For the very insane it had no more meaning than for the beasts of the field ; perhaps a horse turning out after a Sunday's rest has a clearer conception of what day it is.

But I came across a patient on my first Monday at H. ——— who fully realized what day it was, he knew he was in a madhouse, and was even thankful for it, nor had he any thought about leaving the institution, in fact never nursed a wish for such a contingency, and reasoned to me in an extraordinarily rational way of his unfitness to take up again the burdens of the outside world. One might talk to him for hours without hearing an irrational word from his lips, but leave him alone for five minutes and you would see him begin muttering and shaking his head finally bursting into convulsive laughter, then speak to him and he would start as if from a dream and recommence conversing with you sensibly. To show you the extent of his madness, here is a story an attendant told me about him. One day in the middle of January, mind, he wandered

off in one of his fits of abstraction beyond the boundary of the grounds, was brought back by a policeman, and on being questioned as to his motives declared he had only gone to pick blackberries.

Before I had been a month at the the asylum, the head attendant, while going his rounds one day, was savagely assaulted by a burly patient, and he experienced some rather rough handling ere the attendants came to his rescue. The lives of the chief officers are much imperilled by the inevitable enmity their positions expose them to, for not alone that they hold the key of the patients' prison-house, they are also responsible for the mental condition of the sufferers, in many cases where the poor fellows are conscious of the nature of their terrible malady ; no mythological spirit of evil was ever fathered with so many subterfuges, machinations, and devilries as are laid to the charge of a medical officer of a lunatic asylum.

Dr. S—— forbid Green visiting the wards in future unattended, so I being the least experienced and therefore the least available for general duties, was singled out for the chief attendant's protector.

Between the hours of 10 and 12 o'clock in the forenoon Green used to visit the wards, then after dinner he went into the grounds to see how things were going on there. At bedtime he again passed through the wards and once a week he paid a midnight visit to the dormitories and single rooms.

In conformity with the medical officer's orders, I used to be in attendance on him always on these occasions till a new-comer deprived me of the job. An account of one night's work will convey a sufficient idea of what took place all the year round.

At bed-time we first visited No. 1 ward, where Green made a somewhat lengthened stay, enquiring into the conduct of new arrivals. Seldom a day went by without bringing one or more of these, which the batch of patients discharged cured once a month made room for. No. 6 was the next ward on our round, then followed 5 and 4, after which came the epileptic ward. The inspection of this took up some considerable time ; one or other of the patients was generally in a fit when we got there, and the attendant in charge was busy attending him, so we had to wait till he was ready to receive his orders. We then proceeded to the refractory ward to find all the patients locked up for the night in the single rooms. "All right?" queried Tom Green to the charge attendant. "Yes, with the exception of Livermore," would probably be his reply. "I had to take away his bed to prevent him from tearing it up. Shall I put him on a canvas suit?" The chief attendant would assent to this proposition, and we passed on to the convalescent ward, where we found the patients playing chess, billiards, and dominoes, with a few reading, while a large number, in parties of threes and fours, walked up and down the day-room chatting to-

gether pleasantly. All appeared so very sane, that, to my then inexperienced eyes, it seemed a pity to have them under lock and key. My friend, to whom I once conveyed this sentiment, did not fall in with it. Any one of them, he asserted, might have to be removed to the refractory ward before the morning, and instanced a case in point that happened scarce six months before on the female side of the building. An epileptic patient had been six months in the convalescent ward every day giving additional proofs of a steady progress, till the doctor looked upon her as fit to be discharged, and intimated to her his intention of taking her before the visiting justices at their next meeting to obtain the order for her release. As the day drew near she was excited, of course, over her anticipated re-union with her people, incessantly talked about it, and wondered how she would find her little ones, for she was the mother of a family of young children. The night before the meeting of the justices she had a severe fit, and four hours afterwards had to be removed to a single room, having, in the meantime, become a raging maniac.

"Do you see that young fellow?" said Tom Green, pointing to a stalwart man of four-and-twenty standing beside the billiard-table, "he will be discharged next week and in all probability he will be back before a month. Drink, drink, drink; he can't keep away from it though he knows what it will lead to."

"Yet here you give him drink," said I, for each patient was allowed from half a pint to a pint of beer at dinner. "Don't you think 'tis a mistake to keep the thirst for drink whetted while he is here?" "Perhaps it is," he answered, "but you see we can't make fish of one and fowl of another. To a temperate drinker who had lost his reason, it would be a sore hardship to be cut off abruptly from what he had been used to all his life."

Between twelve and one we generally started on our night round. The first ward we visited was the refractory. The lights over the room doors were left dimly burning. Through a grating they shed a light on the beds inside. How quiet the ward seemed now compared to what it was in the middle of the day. Low mutterings or an occasional howl might be heard, but the din and confusion of the day-time had all subsided.

The first man we looked at—this was the first time I accompanied the chief attendant on his midnight round—was sleeping soundly, and after reclosing and locking his door we passed on to the next single room. We could hear a muttering inside, and on opening the door we found the occupant pacing the narrow limits of the apartment. Tom Green tried to persuade him to lie down for the room was chilly and he had nothing on but his shirt. He would not, so with the assistance of the night attendant he was removed to a refractory cell. These cells or single rooms were fitted with an inner and an outer door, the former with a quick-act-

ing catch and a strong piece of glass let into the panel to enable the attendants to see inside without opening it. There was a fire against the outer wall to warm the apartment, for frequently the bedding and bed had to be taken away from a patient to save them from being torn up.

From one single room to another we quietly passed. Presently we came to one in confusion. The little bedstead was disjointed, the sheets and blankets torn into shreds, and the madman sitting smiling in the midst of the debris. He was also removed to a refractory cell and we continued on our round.

In one of the double-doored cells was a patient who had been discharged cured six weeks before, and had just been brought back worse than ever through drink. I had a peep at him. He was on his hands and knees tracing with his finger the lines and cross lines on the floorcloth, muttering "Criss, cross, up and down." This would be his occupation the livelong night, Green told me.

Leaving the refractory ward we entered No. 1 and took a peep at the padded rooms. Most offensively did they smell; they cannot be kept perfectly sweet on account of the padded wainscoting. A couple of helpless old men were their occupants; these were too weak to stand, and too idiotic to lie quiet. Spread over the floors and reaching close up to the walls were coir beds, so that when the patients attempted to get up they would not be hurt by the inevitable fall.

As soon as we entered the next ward loud talking could be heard in one of the single rooms. We approached the door on tip-toe and listened. It was occupied by an ex-sea captain. He was standing on his bed, which he imagined was his ship, lustily shouting his orders to his men, his nautical phraseology generously interspersed with rolling expletives. No sooner was Tom Green's key inserted in the lock of the door than a lull fell on the storm, and ere the door was opened the old salt was down between the blankets, snoring away in feigned slumber.

Close to the captain's quarters slept good-natured Tom —, one of the most inoffensive of patients. He was relegated to a single room on account of a habit he had of incessantly muttering "Right, right, by Jove! 'Tis right; it's right, sure enough." As I looked at him his face was in repose, his breast heaving gently, and the words he was always repeating seemed to slip from his tongue while he slept.

Entering the next apartment, the light of our lamp rested for a minute on the face of a once-famous pugilist. He was calmly sleeping, with his broad shoulders uncovered, and his sinewy arms stretched out across the counterpane. Extreme caution was necessary, for he ill brooked being disturbed at night. He could have slept with the other patients in the large dormitories, only a snoring

patient might at any time have roused his anger into a flame not easily subduable.

On we went from room to room, finding the majority of the inmates sleeping soundly. The rightful heir to the throne of Austria, who had been robbed of his crown by perfidious ministers, lay in a careless slumber; so did the poet emperor, with his pencil and sheets of manuscript close to his bedside.

In the larger dormitories, each of which contained nearly a hundred patients, nothing remarkable was to be seen. A few sleepless ones were sitting up in bed, but all the rest were buried in a profound slumber. A dwarf was sleeping in one of the large dormitories along with the other patients; he was huddled up in the blanket, his face partly hidden from view. Tom Green uncovered his face, and to this day I carry a vivid picture in my mind of sleep's peaceful smile on his wizened face with its huge mouth. Soon after this we finished our round, and went home to bed.

The next morning was bathing day for No. 3, and as Green was in duty bound to be present while this was going on we went across to that part of the building in which the baths were, about 10 a.m. The boiler fire had been alight since early morning, so that by the time the patients were marched into the dressing-room where the clean linen and white trousers were heaped up in one corner, a good supply of hot water was ready. The bath-room contained a double row of baths, each screened from its neighbour by green baize curtains. Green had a thermometer in his hand, and as each bath was prepared he tested its temperature before allowing the patient to enter it. The saner patients were the first in the field, and thus several batches were got off expeditiously. Then came those who did not appreciate a dip, who undressed reluctantly, and more reluctantly entered the water. One man refused to bathe; he said he was suffering from a cold. Tom Green felt his pulse and told him he saw no reason for treating him exceptionally. He would not undress, however, and two of the attendants had to do it for him and drag him into the bath-room. Having got him to the side of the bath they were going to lift him in when he said he would step in quietly. Before doing so, however, he felt the water and declared it was too cold. In went the chief attendant's thermometer; the water was found to be just the regulation temperature. This the patient disagreed with, and expressed his determination not to enter the bath till the temperature was raised. Much coaxing was tried and praiseworthy forbearance exercised, but, ultimately, force had to be resorted to. In the bath he furiously splashed the water in the attendants' faces, viciously biting at those who were holding him while two others scrubbed him.

"You see," said Tom Green to me, "the evil of regarding a tolerably sane patient as irresponsible for his actions. He does all

this to annoy us, because he knows there is no regular code of rules forbidding refractory conduct and that trivial cases of assault will be allowed to go unpunished; it often leads to patients getting hurt, for the attendants too often, I fear, place the punishing of such fellows in the hands of another patient who willingly undertakes it for an ounce of tobacco. Now, take this case that happened here not long ago. There is a patient here at present, one of these ne'er-do-wells, who, let him out to-day cured, would be back again in less than a month. He's a lazy drunken fellow, and my belief is that he likes this place better than the workhouse or prison. Finding he would enjoy greater liberty if he did some sort of work he consented to hang about the cow-sheds; but he wasn't long at this till he began accosting the female attendants, and wound up at last by attempting to commit a criminal assault on a young woman in a lonely part of the grounds. When spoken to about it he impudently asserted that he was a madman, and therefore not answerable for what he did. Six months on the treadmill is what he deserved, but the only punishment he suffered was a curtailment of the liberty he had been enjoying."

Many of the patients after getting into the bath sat there contentedly, making no effort to wash themselves, and would have remained there all day I believe, had not the attendants roused them into activity.

A peculiar cry—a cry something resembling that of a hare caught in a trap—came from the further end of the dressing-room, and down came an attendant bearing in his arms what looked like an infant. It was a most hideously deformed dwarf, the one Green showed me in bed the previous night. I had a good look at him as he lay in the bath. His legs and arms were twisted in on the body like a trussed fowl. His head was nearly as large as his body, his face deeply furrowed and his mouth abnormally large. He was sixty years of age.

All the patients being now bathed we hurried away from the steaming apartments, and got out into the grounds. We just looked in at the carpenter's shop, where half-a-dozen patients were at work, and then went home to dinner.

"The dwarf? You would like to hear all I know about him, would you?" said Tom Green to me next morning, as I escorted him on his daily rounds. "I don't suppose that I should ever have known what I do about him, only a man, who was born in the same village as his father and mother, finished up a drinking bout by having to remain here for a few months. The father and mother didn't belong to this country; they came from a village in the north-west of Ireland.

"Many years ago in this same village in Ireland a man was living who made himself very obnoxious among his neighbours,

and one night a party of masked men broke into his house, dragged him out of bed, and tying him up to the cross beam of the chimney began carding his back with wool cards. After they gave him a good punishing that way they rubbed salt into his lacerated flesh. While they were doing this the man's wife had cut a piece of cloth out of the tail of one of the men's overcoats unknown to its wearer, so that when her husband died, as might have been expected he would, she was able to hand over to the authorities a clue to one of the perpetrators of the outrage.

"For a long time before this happened two young fellows—James and Jack Brennan, half-brothers by the same father—paid attentions to a Rosie Manning. The eldest brother James was, it seems, the favourite with her all along, but, as women will sometimes do, she changed unaccountably, and began looking on the younger one favourably.

"The brothers lived in a small cottage with their father's widow, and farmed together a score or more acres of land attached to it. Jack was the widow Brennan's own son, James her stepson, but I'm told she was a good sensible woman and treated both as if they were her own children. They used to get on comfortably together, but from the hour the fickle Rosie changed towards James dissensions and unpleasantness crept into the house, James being generally the party at fault in the quarrels. Jack did all he could to soften and turn aside his brother's anger, but every day saw the disappointed lover growing sourer and testier and more unbearable, and he took to spending his nights in the neighbouring shebeen. The widow was as sorry as could be to see such a change for the worse in her stepson, and did all she could to allay the bitter feelings in his breast.

"But James remained unforgiving, and every evening as soon as work was over on the farm he hied off to the shebeen to drown his rage and disappointment in poteen. The carding of the obnoxious farmer was planned at this very shebeen, and James Brennan made one of the party, and to better disguise himself he borrowed on the sly his brother's overcoat, for it had a wide collar that when turned up concealed half the wearer's face. It was said, when the whole truth of the affair came out, that he had put on the overcoat to incriminate his brother; but, be that as it may, it was from this very overcoat that the piece was snipped.

"About a week after the man was carded to death a fair was held in the neighbouring town, and the unconscious Jack donned his overcoat and with a light heart betook himself to the fair to meet his sweetheart. The overcoat was spotted at the fair and Jack was arrested.

"In the Good Old Times, as they are called, the law it seems didn't set much value on a man's life; for Jack, though he strongly protested he was innocent and proved (not a difficult thing then

unfortunately for him) an *alibi*, he was found guilty on this flimsy bit of evidence and condemned to death.

"The execution, as was customary in those days, took place on the nearest hill to the scene of the murder, so that poor Jack was hung almost opposite his heart-broken mother's door. Not a word did the unnatural brother breathe, nor an effort did he make to save the innocent young fellow's life. Some excused him on the grounds that his fellow murderers kept him soaked in drink till all was over.

"Jack died protesting his innocence, and just as the cart was dragged from under his feet, his distracted mother, who was with difficulty kept away from the gallows by the soldiers, fell on her knees and prayed that Heaven's vengeance might light on those who had let her innocent boy suffer for their crime.

"Now comes the worst part of the story. Immediately after his brother's death James gave over his drinking ways, managed to effect a reconciliation with Rosie, and ere the end of three months made her his wife. That in itself was enough to give him a bad name; but when the real facts of the case began to be put about, James and Rosie had to fly to save themselves from being lynched. The law in those days never made a mistake, and wouldn't admit having hung the wrong man, so James was allowed to go scot free.

"He and Rosie came to England and settled in S—. They had one child, and only one—the idiot and cripple you saw huddled up in the blankets the night before last.

"When I first came to the asylum the dwarf was here, and I remember the father and mother, then a grey-haired couple, coming to see him about every six months. First the mother died, and then the father used to come alone. Then he too stopped coming, I suppose he also having died, and now no one ever comes to ask after him. I've thought many a time about his grandmother's curse, and wondered if 'twas on this poor creature's head it descended."

Every Saturday night there was a dance held in the large dining-hall, and most thoroughly did the patients enjoy it. Some of them were exceedingly graceful dancers. The male attendants had to dance with the female patients, and *vice versa*; of course if two patients desired to dance together they were at liberty to do so. A remarkable old couple used to sit in one corner of the room—a man and wife, both inmates. This was the only opportunity they had of meeting, and I've heard they looked forward with childish eagerness to their few hours' chat once a week. When they were first pointed out to me, and I learned the relationship existing between them, I was rather astonished at so strange a coincidence. Happening to mention it next day to Green, he told me about Howard Mervin, a patient who was brought to H— soon after he was appointed chief attendant.

"Howard was the son of a well-to-do stockbroker. He followed

his father's profession, and so successfully too that at the age of eight-and-twenty he considered himself able to support a wife stylishly.

"Howard courted the girl he married two years, and such a girl as his Maggie never breathed on the earth before he put the ring on her finger, and such a wife after no man since the days of Adam was blest with—in a word, he adored her.

"Well, when they got married of course they must have the conventional honeymoon trip, and the Continent was chosen. They first visited Paris, then went on to a few towns in the south of France, crossed over into Spain, spent a week in Madrid, and finally travelled on to Lisbon.

"It was their original intention to come back by the same way as they went, but Maggie got the notion into her head of returning by water; and after the young couple talking the matter over, they resolved on going home, if possible, in a sailing vessel—the most delightful way, they thought, of ending up their honeymoon.

"Howard, of course, was all eagerness to gratify his adored young wife's wishes. He searched and searched nearly the whole of one day, and after many disappointments found a vessel towards evening the captain of which could accommodate them. He hurried home to the expectant Maggie with the glad tidings, and she was in transports of joy.

"The vessel was to sail in a couple of days. In the meantime Howard and Maggie took a trip to a place within a day's journey of Lisbon—the name I can't remember—and returned on the day the ship was going to sail. Ten at night was the time fixed for her leaving port, so they had several hours to spare, which they spent in sight-seeing and looking into the shop windows.

"Whilst looking in at a shop window Maggie saw a brooch, not an expensive one either, which she greatly admired. Her husband could see she wanted it, but he had already spent a good round sum on their trip; so he thought it was time to think of retrenchment, and for the first time since they were married he turned a stony heart to her wishes. As they passed on he noticed a cloud of disappointment flit across her face. This caused him a twinge of remorse, and it required all the resolution of his nature to stay his turning back and encroaching still further on his already well-exhausted purse by the purchase of the bit of jewellery.

"They went on, whiling away their time, and about six o'clock stepped aboard the vessel and took possession of their cabin. Maggie—what with walking about all the afternoon, and her journey in the earlier part of the day—was fairly fagged out, and consequently was very dull. Howard, still the lover watching all her moods, noticed this dulness, and attributed it to her disappointment at him not buying the brooch for her; so he secretly resolved, if opportunity offered, on stealing back to the shop and buying it.

"Well, to his cost he did find an opportunity. Worn out with the fatigues of the day, Maggie fell asleep in the cabin, and he (without saying anything to the captain or any one else) stealthily stepped ashore again and hurried off to the shop, picturing to himself Maggie's pleased, grateful look when he returned with his purchase.

"But while he was away the captain (who thought his two passengers were aboard) was persuaded by the pilot—so Howard thinks—to start two hours earlier than he intended. When young Mervin came back with the brooch, an hour after stealing from the cabin, the ship had sailed.

"Poor Maggie felt so drowsy that (though she heard the preparations going on for the start) she never opened her eyes till close on eleven, by which time the vessel was speeding away under full sail for England. Her consternation and grief on finding her husband was not on board may well be imagined. She piteously implored the captain to turn back. He did his best to console her, while pointing out to her his inability to accede to her prayer, telling her that in all probability her husband was already on his way to England by train, and that he would be at Liverpool (the ship's destination) to meet her, that with the continuance of the fair weather then favouring them she would not be long separated from him.

"Howard in the meantime, just as the captain had said, was on his way to Liverpool. He duly arrived there, hired apartments for himself and his wife, and anxiously waited the arrival of the 'Rose Drummond'; this was the name of the vessel that had his precious cargo aboard. As the time she was expected to arrive drew near his joy knew no bounds, and he frequently smiled at the thought of how heartily they would laugh over the adventure when they met.

"The anxiously-looked-for day at last arrived and went, and so did another and another, but no 'Rose Drummond' was heard of. Day by day he eagerly scanned the sightings list; he distractedly roamed about the streets during the day, and at night restlessly paced his room, without as much as an hour's sleep at a stretch.

"Two days more were added to his long hours of anxieties and fears. Grave misgivings, he gradually found out, were beginning to be entertained about the 'Rose Drummond's' safety, and those fears were much augmented by incoming vessels reporting having experienced squally weather at sea.

"A week went by, but the 'Rose Drummond' didn't turn up! A fortnight, still no news of her! Three weeks, and nothing whatever could be learned of her fate! Howard was at the office of the owners every morning, to learn if they had heard anything of their missing vessel; and at the end of six weeks the manager reluctantly informed him that they had abandoned all hopes of

her safety. The poor fellow, despite this disheartening truth, still feebly clung to hope; but he at last gave way to despair, and went home to the newly furnished villa prepared for his dear wife a heart-broken man.

"His business abilities were gone. One by one his clients deserted him; not without good reason, for when they sought his advice they found him drunk, or otherwise unfitted for the transaction of business. His father assisted him with his services, counsel, and purse; his friends all tried to console, to cheer, and restore him to the energetic man he had so suddenly put off—but their efforts availed nothing; he was hopelessly set on a downward course.

"For days he wouldn't go near his office, and at last gave it up altogether and took to visiting provincial towns and cities, following some will-o'-the-wisp hope of doing business. At each of the places where he stayed a month or two he went on the loose, and his drinking bouts ended up at last at D——, our nearest seaport town, by getting up one morning—no longer Howard Mervin, but a cannibal king, wanting to eat the chamber-maid of the hotel he was stopping at.

"Well, he was brought here, and very violent he was. As soon as we peeled off the strait-waistcoat he gave the relieving officer who had brought him a black eye. It took six of us to get him into the bath, and he was at once transferred to the refractory ward.

"Here he was, a cannibal king threatening to eat every one he saw; but he met more than his match in this ward, and after one or two stiff thrashings from his fellow-patients—these things no amount of vigilance can prevent—he sobered down considerably. He soon showed signs of convalescence, and I immediately had him removed to a better ward.

"The improvement steadily went on. I took rather a particular interest in him, he was such a fine-looking young fellow, and ere long I was able to give permission for him to be taken out in the grounds and allowed to do anything in the shape of work he fancied.

"At the time I am speaking of the patients' weekly dance was held on Wednesdays. The first Howard was permitted to attend was about two months after his admission. As soon as the men entered the ball-room, and they and the women commenced mingling together in the dance, I heard the shrill accents of a woman crying 'Howard! my darling Howard!' and looking round, there was one of the female patients sobbing hysterically in Howard Mervin's arms.

"It was Maggie. The 'Rose Drummond' did go to the bottom one night in a squall; but before it happened Maggie had rushed on deck in her night dress, and the captain had just strapped a life

belt belonging to himself around her when a wave washed her overboard. For hours she endured the terrible buffetings of the waves bravely, but at last she lost consciousness. When she came to again it was morning—at least so she said,—the sea was comparatively smooth, and no vestige of the ‘Rose Drummond’ in sight. She prayed and wept, and hoped and despaired, but kept very still—for she was a fairly good swimmer, and had consequently acquired confidence in the water which very much befriended her then—till an unaccountable darkness came over her mind.

“She was picked up by a homeward-bound vessel—a grey-haired haggard woman, stark staring mad—not the remotest gleam of reason about her. When the incident got into the few papers that were in circulation in those days she was described as a woman of fifty. No one knew who she was, and all the information that could be squeezed out of her was that she was a Spanish countess; and in due course she was handed over to us. The sight of her husband restored her to her senses.”





PART IV.

PUNISHING PATIENTS.—THE ATTENDANTS AND PATIENTS.—
MRS. CULLERWELL AND THE CHAPLAIN.—A MIDNIGHT
TUSSLE WITH A RAGING MANIAC.—SUPERNATURAL WHIS-
PERS.—CUNNING PATIENTS.



I WAS two years at H——. Two years! My first peep at the inside of it terrorized me into the resolve to remain there hardly a month. But I soon grew accustomed to the noise and confusion of tongues, and though I never settled down to the work, I managed to pass some fairly pleasant days among the sylvan scenes surrounding that home of horrors. As soon as I made myself the patients' master my duties were, comparatively speaking, light and easy. Sometimes I received a blow, but seldom a second from the same man; the pugnacious patient can remember being punished.

But the castigation of refractory lunatics ought not to be, as is generally the case, tacitly deputed to the attendants; an asylum should be regarded as an hospital in which irresponsible citizens are treated, with a view to restoring them to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. How, in the name of reason, can it be done by allowing them to kick, bite, and strike their attendants with impunity? Have a graduated code of punishments, and much of the cruelty practised in asylums could be put a stop to, an efficient staff of attendants might be kept together, the patients would be happier in having old hands to look after them instead of new ones (who as a rule are overbearing and arbitrary), and there would be no bribing of one inmate to punish another—which often, I fear, leads to murder.

I remember a case that occurred at H—— while I was there, the facts of which have a direct bearing on what I say. An attendant was one morning all alone in a dormitory, rousing the sleeping patients. One man, a convalescent inmate, refused to stir from his bed. The attendant was, perhaps, rather quick-

tempered, and the patient sullen and irritating. Be that as it may, the latter was somewhat roughly dragged out of bed, and he seized the most convenient weapon to him and dealt the attendant such a blow that the man was stunned by the force of it, and lay for several seconds on the floor unconscious and quite at the mercy of his assailant, who doubtless would have murdered him had not a few friendly patients intervened. As soon as the attendant came to, up he jumped, fell upon the patient, and beat him till there was not a white patch to be seen on his blackened face. The case was reported to the medical superintendent, and what did he do? Nothing, under the circumstances; for he could not have justly punished the attendant, and so had to allow a dangerous precedent to lurk in the minds of his staff. Now had that refusal to leave his bed been regarded as a serious breach of discipline to be punitively dealt with by the medical superintendent, the attendant (under pain of being punished himself) would have been forced to use more forbearance, and the unfortunate man (who was on the point of being discharged cured) would have been saved the fit which followed the beating he had, and the consequent relapse, which put an end to all his hopes of a speedy release.

Of course with a certain class of patients a code of punishments would be nugatory; but as a rule the really irresponsible are very docile, and give the least trouble to those who look after them. I would rather have fifty irrational creatures to deal with than one cantankerous convalescent patient.

Again, in many cases punishment would be barbarous, as (for instance) in the following: Jaques, a foreigner, required the undivided care of one man, for if left to himself his favourite diversion was smashing windows. Sensible enough to know when he was in the hands of a new attendant, he generally seized this favourable opportunity to send his elbow through a square of glass. Then he would innocently look into his surprised keeper's face, and utter that only English sentence he was capable of framing, "Do me good, dat." He was quite irresponsible for his actions—in fact many mischievous animals of the brute creation surpassed him in intelligence. His dress usually consisted of a suit of strong coarse canvas, which had to be locked upon him, for he preferred the primitive state to the usages of modern society.

There is one ward where a code of punishments, if at all admissible, would have to be judiciously put in force—the epileptic ward. The epileptic patient, though, generally speaking the most rational of all the inmates, requires considerate treatment. Any undue excitement may bring on a fit, and it is only after one of these fits the patient's mind quite loses its balance; and then a weakly and inoffensive man may become so fierce and refractory that several strong officers are required to master him.

I have known a patient go for months without one of these

violent attacks. He worked regularly about the grounds, was even allowed to go into the village to purchase tobacco, came back exactly at the appointed hour, and in every respect behaved as a rational individual. One day he would suffer some trifling annoyance, and down he would fall in a fit, and arise out of it a dangerous maniac, ready to seize the nearest weapon and kill whatever living thing stood in his way.

Leaving the question of punishment to wiser heads than mine, a few reminiscences, pleasant and otherwise, of those simple good-natured souls with which the asylum abounded may prove interesting.

First and foremost comes old B——, a really droll old fellow who never spoke a single coherent sentence. He had, nevertheless, a wonderful gift of the gab, and hour after hour would spin out the most ridiculous string of words, while all the while he elaborately illustrated his speech with all manner of gestures and grimaces. Here is a sample of one of his little harangues, generally delivered while chewing a quid of tobacco, which he frequently took from his mouth to shove into his ears, poise on the tip of his nose, or pass through one of his buttonholes:—

“You see Malcolm when the little bopeeps jumped over the figtree and the three little nightingales went out for a walk the rain washed the church steeple right on top of the corn laws and the old hen jumping down off the roof of the schoolhouse to peck up the pebbles shouted to her mate ‘Cheese old cock!’”

He was a bony, angular-featured man, with laughing blue eyes, who kept himself scrupulously clean. He liked a shorn chin, and resorted to rather a primitive method of shaving it—pulling out the growing hairs. He used to assist in the laundry, being a handy old fellow about machinery. One day he took to sulking—as a rule he was sprightly and energetic—and neither by coaxing nor threatening could we prevail on him to do anything, so the charge attendant told me to take him back to the ward. This interference with his liberty old B—— passionately resented; and I shall never forget (for I was exceedingly amused) the stream of incoherent vituperation he poured out on the attendant. While escorting him back to the ward I could see, by the sundry shakings of his head and the low mutterings that kept escaping from his lips, he was in a wrathful mood. Just as we were passing a flock of geese they set up a loud cackle. B—— instantly picked up a stone and flung it among them with the spitefully-uttered remark, “I’ll teach you not to laugh at the old fool,” and killed one of them. It was the most vicious act I ever knew him to be guilty of, and the remark the most coherent I ever heard him utter.

His daughter came to see him one day, and it fell to my duty to be present at the interview. He knew her, was delighted to see her, but never a single remark of his could she or I understand.

At times I believe he managed to squeeze twenty subjects into one sentence. She laughed heartily, and I had to do the same; and the more we laughed the more animated the old gentleman grew; and he too fairly roared, in the exuberance of his mirth, between his nonsensical sayings.

But this is the bright side of the visiting-room, seldom seen, alas! Many a bitter tear have I seen shed there, as the young wife looked eagerly into her insane husband's face with that sad, mournful question, "Do you know me, dear?" to receive only a blank stupid stare in return. Then she would turn to me, who knew it was an almost hopeless case, to ask me about his condition—did he ever speak of her or their children, and if I thought he would get better. And what could I say? What could any one with a human heart do but mutter some vague indefinite answer not calculated to wholly destroy the blessed hope that partially brightened her young and clouded life.

There has my heart often ached at the sight of the mother bending over her idiot boy—idiot in everything except in love for the one who bore him. How reluctantly she tore herself away from him; and oh, it was pitiful to see his outstretched arms as she went away, and doubly pitiful was her sorrowful look over her shoulder ere the door closed between them!

In the visiting-room was once begun a tragedy that was consummated in the ward. Some friends came to visit a patient, and brought with them—as many foolishly do—a bottle of whiskey, which they gave him while the attendant's eyes were turned away. The latter noticing the bulkiness of the patient's pocket when he took him back to the ward, searched him, found the whiskey, and forthwith reported the matter to the governor. A few days afterwards, as this same attendant was passing through the ward, he received a fatal stab from the aggrieved inmate, who had by some means armed himself with a sharp-pointed nail.

What a troublesome creature the suicidal patient is! He requires the unrelenting vigilance of his keepers to prevent him from destroying his life. Once I found a patient standing against the wall, his face blue and swollen, and knowing that several red marks stood against his name in the ward book (denoting the number of times he had made determined attempts on his life), I examined his neck, and found his necktie fastened so tightly around his throat that I had the greatest difficulty to get my fingers underneath to untie it.

This was the favourite method of attempting to commit suicide with J——, an ex-schoolmaster. Frequently during the night and day we had to examine his neck. Moody and silent he would stand all day, in some out-of-the-way corner. One morning I coaxed him to do a little scrubbing, and he did it so well I rewarded him with an extra-substantial dinner and a pint of beer. Every day afterwards he worked at something or other. He became more cheerful,

his mental condition rapidly improved, and in six months after I had the satisfaction of seeing him discharged cured.

Thanks to the teetotal faddist, beer nowadays is almost universally denied asylum patients, but I remember the increased allowance to workers used to be a strong incentive to healthful exercise among the inmates of H——. It is scarcely fair to a temperate drinker whose mind gets unhinged to be suddenly cut off from the harmless glass of beer he has been accustomed to all his life. No one who has the welfare of the human race at heart but must deplore the excessive use of alcohols, but the instillation of the lesson of sobriety comes too late within an asylum walls. Teach on the other side of them the nobility of self-restraint, from the want of which all immoral habits spring, and suffer no man to be so childish and unmanly as to evade his own responsibility for these by shunting it on to another's shoulders; they originate in his own degraded brain instead of a Spirit of Evil's.

Poor Mrs. Cullerwell, I well remember that portly good-natured old dame as she sat in church listening to the chaplain's sermon with that disdainful and obvious I-know-better-than-you smile on her calm face. She had suicidal tendencies but they never assumed determined proportions; it may have been that she was somewhat reconciled to an evil world by the hope, always animating her, that she was shortly to become the mother of another Messiah. Day after day she was busy making baby-linen to clothe its little limbs, and very beautiful work she used to turn out.

One afternoon I was meeting Mr. ——, the chaplain, on a gravel path in front of the female's side of the building when a sweet cheery voice called out

"Mr. ——."

It was Mrs. Cullerwell's.

"Yes mam"—and that most sedate and dignified of mortals turned a polite ear to the terrible lady, the lash of whose tongue he had often felt.

"Why do you allow such undue intimacy to exist between your wife and Dr. ——?" (the assistant medical superintendent).

The chaplain, without a word, turned off looking as black as thunder; and although there weren't the slightest grounds for such a serious accusation he was evidently ill-at-ease. He glanced at me; less of a hypocrite then than now my face wore a broad helpless grin which I fear added considerably to the reverend gentleman's discomforture. But you should have heard the delightful chuckle Mrs. Cullerwell cast after her enemy—the man of all others who should have been, yet was not, the first to recognise her divine vocation.

George Lambe was another of the remarkable characters in H—— and a suicidal patient; tall, wiry, heavy-browed, stern, sallow-featured man he stands before me now in his self-created

halo of tragedy. His words were few and delivered in a laboured and dignified style. He lived in a chronic state of repentance but shrank from the slightest allusion to his sinful past.

Here is a case of the ultra-developed form of mania masquerading nowadays under the names of spiritualism, clairvoyance, mystic insight, psychic forces and similar illusions, parasitic charlatanism so easily fastens on, arising from a disordered stomach neglected. Ted Steers was a gloomy, low-browed, red-haired man of medium height belonging to the intelligent class of lunatics. He had the character of being a quiet patient, although he had never much to say, which, so far as my experience goes, is indicative of a vicious temper in the insane, and moped about the ward all day refusing to perform any sort of work.

He was, however, the last man from whom a violent outburst of refractory conduct would be anticipated. He slept in one of the large dormitories among the bettermost class of patients. I and four others were called up one morning at two o'clock to the night attendant's assistance, Steers having commenced smashing the windows of his sleeping apartment. We found him clinging to the sash bars, out of which sharp pieces of glass protruded, sending his bleeding arm and hand through every whole square within his reach. We dragged him back; he struggled violently, and though by no means a muscular fellow, he seemed to have become endowed with Herculean strength. Over and over we rolled with him on the floor, he kicking, biting, and striking savagely. At last he was overpowered and we carried him down to a refractory cell in which we locked him. Up he sprang as nimble as a cat to the grating over the door and began gnawing at the iron bars and trying to wrench them asunder with his wounded hands from which the blood was flowing copiously. One of the attendant's had gone for the doctor, but before the latter arrived Steer's fit of madness had spent its force, and when the door was opened again he was trembling and cowering in a corner like a whipped puppy.

"Ted, my man, what's the matter?" asked the doctor kindly.

"They wouldn't let me be sir" he answered tremulously; "they made me do it; they wouldn't let me sleep."

"They" were haunting whispers, which, in his case, was a fresh phase of his mental troubles. Whenever people begin to hear these supernatural whispers they should at once seek medical advice, for the hallucination is apt to develop into a dangerous form of madness.

Let me cite the case of another man, that it may be a warning to those troubled with preternatural influences to look to their health. I met him on a tramcar about six months ago, and the course of a conversation with him he complained to me of feeling a burning sensation in the posterior lobe of his brain, and that he could not cross any of the London bridges; something seemed to

push him back whenever he attempted to do so. Here was a spiritualistic medium at work and it only required the gravity of a seance to produce a splendid farce. I told him to have a mild aperient when he needed it, to take a penny ride on the outside of an omnibus across one or other of the bridges as often as he could; and not to be afraid to look at the water, and above all things to mingle with cheerful people. I ran across him the other day; he had followed my advice he told me, and now the unseen hand no longer bothers him.

Patients bent on escaping, if at all cunning, give their custodians a considerable amount of trouble. Dick May was one of this class. A locksmith by trade, a piece of wire or a nail (whenever he lit on either) supplied him with the means of setting himself at liberty, and his escapes were generally planned with an astonishing amount of craftiness.

Another artful old fellow was Simon Smith, who looked after the attendants' rooms. Many a time have I found him with his head buried in the chimney, enjoying a surreptitious smoke, when in went his pipe into a convenient hiding-place; and if I dared to accuse him of violating the rules of the institution, the look of wounded innocence he gave me was enough to move the stoniest heart to self-reproach. There was an odd mixture of piety and unintentional irreverence in the old man. His favourite refrain when at work was—

“All Thy mercies still endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure,”

sung in a key shrill enough to wake the dead. “Ever faithful, ever sure,” he would sometimes repeat in a dramatic voice, and the wild, fierce look of the old fellow was a study. “Like my wife Rebecca Smith; ‘Ever faithful ever sure I will be to you Simon,’ she said, and by —— next day she ran away with a policeman.”

These reminiscences might be prolonged to a much greater length, but I am forced to bring them to a close. Frequently I recall my two years' experiences at H——, especially when I see people taking their pleasures less soberly than they should, men having to follow unhealthy employments, women who expect to become mothers living and toiling all day in a dark dismal cellar where a plant would scarcely survive two days, men striking their children about the head, children of tender age forced into studies only suited for maturer years, creatures leading dissolute lives and begetting offspring, and hundreds of other sights; all sapping the foundations of our nation's weal and happiness, and casting forth upon her resources unfortunate beings, physically or mentally deformed.

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